DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 332 596 HE 024 557

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TITLE Independents, Actives, and Pledges: A Comparison of Academic Achievement.
PUB DATE May 91
NOTE 39p.; Requirements for EDU 649, Murray State University.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Dissertations/Theses - Undetermined (040)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; College Students; Comparative Analysis; *Fraternities; Higher Education; Performance; Social Organizations; *Sororities; Student Organizations
IDENTIFIERS *Murray State University KY

ABSTRACT

This study investigated differences in academic achievement between undergraduate students involved with Greek organizations and undergraduate students independent of Greek organizations. Subjects (N=593) were undergraduate students at Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky in the fall semester of 1990, subdivided by sex, Greek status (independents, pledges, or actives), and college major. Using a Composite ACT score prerequisite, an F-test was performed on the grade point averages (GPA) of the students. The study hypothesized that college students independent of Greek social organization would perform higher academically than members of Greek social organizations, and that "active" members of the organization would perform higher academically than "pledges" of these Greek organizations. Results of the study indicated that independents performed higher academically than pledges. Statistical data did not support the hypothesis that independents achieved higher academically than members of Greek organizations. No conclusions could be drawn dealing with actives. However, females in the study did have a significantly higher GPA average than the males. Includes 22 references. (Author/LPT)

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ED332596

Independents, Actives, and Pledges:
A Comparison of Academic Achievement

Andrew Douglas Porta

Murray State University

Submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for EDU 649

May, 1991

HE 024 557

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Table of Contents

	Page
List of Tables	ii
Abstract	iii
Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Review of Related Literature	3
Statement of the Hypothesis	9
Method	10
Subjects	10
Instruments	11
Experimental Design	13
Procedure	14
Results	17
Discussion	20
References	31
Acknowledgments	34

List of Tables

Table		Page
1.	Subjects	21
2.	Enhancement of ACT Composite Scores	22
3.	Mean ACT Composite Scores Fall Semester 1985-1990	23
4.	Significance Test: College vs Status	24
5.	Grade Point Averages	25
6.	College Mean Grade Point Averages	26
7.	Significance Test: Sex vs Status	27
8.	GPA Differences Based on Sex and Status	28
9.	GPA Differences Based on Sex	29
10.	GPA Differences Based on Status	30

Acknowledgments

All statistical analysis was performed on the SAS/STAT Guide for Personal Computers Version 6 Edition 1987. SAS Institute, Inc. Cary, NC.

The author would like to thank the following for their assistance. Without their help this study would not have been possible. Jim and Phyllis Baurer, Phil Bryan, Ken Fairbanks, Susie Malone, Ross Meloan, and Gini Morgan.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if College students independent of Greek organizations achieve higher academically than students, both Actives and Pledges, involved with Greek organizations. Using a Composite ACT score prerequisite, members of the sample (N=593) had an F-test performed on their Grade Point Average from the Fall 1990 semester at Murray State University. It was concluded that Independents performed higher academically than Pledges (ANOVA with SAS/STAT Guide for PC Version 6; p=.01). No conclusions could be drawn dealing with Actives. Females did have a significantly higher grade point average than males.

Introduction

Do college "country clubs" ruin a students chance to join the real thing later in life? In other words, do the socialization opportunities offered by Greek organizations cause students to overlook the potential academic loses? "Central to the controversy is the presumed value conflict inherent between the intellectual goals of the academy and the social goals of Greeks" (Wilder, Hoyt, Surbeck, Wilder, and Carney, 1986) The Murray State University Undergraduate Bulletin for 1989-1991 lists the Goals of the University. The following is a list of some relevant goals.

Murray State University should:

2. Provide educational experiences that develop intellect and character consistent with the highest ideals of society.
3. Continue its development of a comprehensive and distinctive academic program reflecting student needs and professional career opportunities.
6. Sustain a commitment to academic excellence.
7. Enrich the personal, social, cultural, and educational qualities of student life in formal and informal settings.

In 1984 Sears found that many faculty members were concerned that Greek values impart an anti-intellectual, conservative, pragmatic, and unduly social emphasis to student life that is antithetical to the goals of the institution. Likewise, Wilder and Hoyt (1986) found "the values of the Greek system are not compatible with the intellectual values of the academy." The social attitudes and goals of the Greek organizations may be negatively influencing their academic goals.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to investigate the academic relationship between undergraduate students involved with Greek organizations, both pledges and actives, and undergraduate students independent of Greek organizations. The Greek organizations considered were strictly social organizations as opposed to honor societies. Both fraternity and sorority members were investigated. Pledges must go through a semester long procedure before they become active members. They are required to attend and participate during all functions while actives participate at their convenience; consequently, and quite ironically, the pledges may actually

be more active than the "actives". Thus, the Greek system may have a more adverse effect academically on Greeks than on Independents, and also more adversity for pledges than actives.

Review of Related Literature

Each year Greek organizations draw greater criticism and scrutiny from college faculty and administrators. Many institutions have disbanded fraternities and sororities while other institutions are calling for the reassessment of the Greek role. Obviously, the most highly publicized issues deal with alcohol and hazing problems. These issues may stem from Greek attitudes and goals or the lack of goals.

According to Pennington, Zvonkovic, and Wilson (1989), Greeks are more satisfied with college than independents. Group membership, place of residence, extracurricular involvement, and dating status are all components of college satisfaction. By joining a Greek organization, one is automatically exposed to these areas of college life thus leading to a higher satisfaction. Wilder, Hoyt, Doren, Hauck, and Zettle (1978) found that when compared to Independents, Greeks tend to be conservative, dependent on

family and peers, less culturally sophisticated, and less sensitive to social injustice. Eight years later Wilder et al. (1986) concluded that more active Greeks had a higher correlation with dependence, conservatism, and a lack of cultural sophistication. From this information and the previously discussed information about pledges, it is safe to assume that an "active" pledge will be more dependent, conservative, and less sophisticated than an active. This reiterates the previously stated idea that the Greek system may have a more adverse effect on pledges than on actives. Notice the hierarchy of Independents, Actives, and Pledges. Each is less independent, less liberal, and less sophisticated than the preceding. Marlowe and Auvenshire (1982) characterized persons affiliated with the Greek system as having a higher socioeconomic background, social orientation, professional objectives, and greater propensity toward conservatism. Jakobsen (1986) adds, "Stereotypically, Greeks are generally labeled in the conformist category because they are seen as preoccupied with social niceness, appearance, materialism, and reputation for social acceptance...they also tend to be more peer dependent and competitive in scholastic pursuits." This scholastic competitiveness conclusion can be misleading. For example, every semester Murray State University produces a computer generated list which compares grade point averages of fraternities and sororities. The list does not compare the

Greeks to a random sample of independents. Suelzle and Bradley (1978) concluded that Greeks have lower academic performances although not necessarily lower academic involvement. A more appropriate conclusion may be that Greeks are only academically competitive with other Greeks.

Explaining this collaboration of Greek characteristics is some what common sense. Obviously the lower socioeconomic class, if attending college, will be less apt to spend more money on Greek membership dues, thus leading to the conclusion that most Greeks come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. At first glance, this may seem to contradict the lack of cultural sophistication; however, an abundance of money does not imply sophistication. Wilder et al. (1986) defines cultural sophistication as "authentic sensibility to ideas and art forms." The way many wealthy people throw money around, they can be the most ignorant when it comes to cultural sophistication. A lack of sensitivity to social injustice may also stem from Wilder's definition of cultural sophistication. Are individual Greeks internally motivated to perform public services or are they motivated by duty toward their organization? A person certainly cannot fake apathy. A possible deduction may be that one who does not have authentic sensibility to ideas may also lack authentic sensitivity to social injustices. Segregation of Greek organizations is a prime example of how Greeks are oblivious to social injustices.

Equally obvious is the fact that most Greeks are socially oriented individuals. After all, fraternities and sororities are "social " organizations. Not many introverts are going to torture themselves by being forced to socialize in a Greek organization. Strange (1986) and Wilder et al.(1986) noted that the characteristics describing students who join Greek organizations differ from characteristics of Independents, but this fact is a result of their individual backgrounds and not their memberships. In other words, people who join Greek organizations already have the characteristics of a Greek. "Greek membership is associated with increased self esteem which is consistent with perceiving oneself as part of the elite campus social structure."(Suelzle and Bradley, 1978) The bottom line is that Greeks have a desire for social acceptance.

Likewise, students who join Greek organizations have a dependence on family or peers. This dependence is very evident in the findings of John S. Baird, Jr. In the Fall of 1980, Baird reported on current trends in college cheating. Greeks admitted more frequent cheating than independents. He noted that "Fraternity and Sorority students were more likely to engage in cooperative techniques (copying assignments and tests, allowing others to copy work, and taking tests for other people) than were Independents." The pledge becomes dependent on the actives in terms of acceptance into the organization. He/she must conform to the standards of the

actives. By joining a Greek organization, the individual becomes part of a family with brothers, sisters, big brothers, big sisters, little brothers, and little sisters. To a certain extent dress and with whom to associate are also dictated. This "family" tends to decrease both independence and liberalism of the individual members. Pledges become conservative in that they want to fit the mold for that particular organization. In other words if the pledges do not meet the standards of the actives, they are not accepted. This concept alone breeds dependence and conservatism.

The professional objectives characteristic stems from the "getting a job" motive as the most important gauge of a successful college career. (Strange, 1986) In 1985 Green and Astin concluded that students are more interested in marketable careers such as medicine, business, law, or engineering and less interested in the altruistic or helping professions such as teaching, nursing, social work or the clergy. The interest in a marketable career is a form of materialism. Little interest in the helping profession seems to agree with the lack of concern for social injustices characteristic. This fact leads back to the original conflict. The Greek organizations' goals versus the institutions' goals. The Greeks have trouble adhering to the goals and ideals of the faculty and administrators when they do not aspire to be in either of those two professions.

Strange (1986) points out that if the administrators are to preserve the goals of the institution, they must re-orient the goals and attitudes of student organizations, such as the Greek system.

Wilder and Hoyt (1986) suggest that academic stress may have reinforced students to look for social support in Greek affiliations. The Greek system operates by organizations selecting pledges as well as pledges selecting organizations. Now, to a certain extent, prospective pledges are aware of the scholastic records or reputations of the Greek organizations and attempt to find a good match. In terms of academics, they may predetermine their own fate. (Schrager, 1986; Warwick, 1962) found a positive relation between a "past success index" of the Greek organization and grades of its first year members. Butler (1959) concluded that pledge achievement was a function of the active members' attitude toward, and concern with, scholastic activities. Once again, the idea that pledges model the behavior of actives applies. Does this imply that students "sandbag" and join a Greek organization to relieve the pressures of achieving their academic potential?

Wilder (1972) found that Greeks were less academically motivated and scored lower on Scholastic Aptitude Tests than Independents. Scholastic aptitude tests, in particular the American College Testing Program (ACT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), have been determined to be valid

predictors of college achievement. (Dohner, 1967; Beasley, Jr. and Sease, 1974; Halpin, Halpin, and Hauf, 1976; Malloch and Michael, 1981; Dreher and Singer, 1985) From the two previous statements, one might attempt to conclude that Greeks perform lower academically than do Independents.

Statement of the Hypothesis

Previous research and analysis showed that the goals and attitudes of Greek students are different from the goals and attitudes of Independent students and also the academic institution itself. Past results have also concluded that Greeks score lower on Scholastic Aptitude Tests and that these very same Tests are accurate predictors of college success or lack of success. Therefore, college students independent of Greek social organizations will perform higher academically than the members of Greek social organizations. Moreover, "active" members of Greek social organizations will perform higher academically than "pledges" of these Greek social organizations.

Method

Subjects

Subjects for this study were randomly selected from the population of undergraduate students at Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky in the Fall semester of 1990. The sample was taken from a predominantly Caucasian, middle-class population. Members of the sample had to have a Composite ACT score of 19, 20, 21, 22, or 23. The total sample size was 593 with 322 females (54%) and 271 males (46%). [See Table 1]

The females were further subdivided in terms of Greek status. There were 107 Independents (33%), 140 Actives (44%), and 75 Pledges (23%). Likewise, the males were subdivided. There were 71 Independents (26%), 177 Actives (65%), and 23 Pledges (9%).

Notice the higher percentage of female Pledges compared to male Pledges (23 to 9). One reason for this difference is the fact that Murray State University does not allow fraternities to recruit first semester freshman males unless the fraternity is in jeopardy of losing its chapter due to low membership. The sororities, on the other hand, are permitted to recruit first semester freshmen females. Sampling from the spring semester would tend to show a higher

percentage of male pledges; however, the time factor did not warrant this adjustment.

The total sample of 593 was also subdivided by College major. There were 166 students from the College of Business and Public Affairs (28%), 75 from the College of Fine Arts and Communication (13%), 87 from the College of Education (15%), 33 from the College of Humanistic Studies (5.5%), 138 from the College of Industry and Technology (23%), 61 from the College of Science (10%), and 33 Undecided majors (5.5%).

The researcher was not interested in stratifying the sample to the same proportions of males and females from the entire population. Similarly, the population proportions for College majors was not imperative for the success of the study; however, the random selection process used to determine the sample should have followed a similar pattern established in the entire population.

The selection process is discussed in great detail in the Procedure portion of this paper.

Instruments

The Composite score on the ACT was the instrument used to determine admission into the sample. "The ACT Composite

is a derived score based on the student's performance on the four subtests: Mathematics Usage, English Usage, Natural Sciences Reading, and Social Studies Reading Tests." (Kohler, 1973) The ACT has been revised which has brought about the need to enhance scores from before October 1989 in order to compare them to scores after October 1989. [See Tables 2 & 3]

The mean Composite ACT Scores for Murray State University Fall Semester 1985-1990 have been 21.0 after enhancement. This information lead the researcher to determine the sample to be in the range of plus or minus two points from the mean ACT (19-23). An appropriate Composite ACT score was chosen as the pre-requisite for admittance into the sample because of its previously mentioned reliability in determining college achievement. Another reason for choosing the ACT was the fact that MSU requires all applicants, with the exception of those transferring with fifteen or more semester hours, submit official ACT reports. Consequently, using the SAT would not have produced a large enough sample size.

The instrument used to determine academic achievement was the Fall 1990 grade point average (GPA). GPA is the ratio of quality points to hours attempted. Quality points are determined by multiplying numerical values for grades (A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, E=0) by credit hours. For example, an A in a five hour class is equivalent to twenty quality points. A semester GPA was used as opposed to a cumulative GPA in

order to obtain a true reading of achievement. Had a cumulative GPA been obtained from Greek members of the sample, it would have been effected by semesters previous to joining a Greek organization, if they pledged after their freshman year. Notice, also that over a period of time, an individual may have been an Independent, a Pledge, and finally an Active. By taking only one semester, the sample members can only fall into one of the three categories during that particular semester.

Experimental Design

This study examined two large groups; Greeks and Independents. The group of Greeks was broken down into two subgroups; Actives and Pledges. A required composite ACT score of 19-23 was the admission ticket into the sample. Once the sample was determined, GPAs from the Fall 1990 semester were used to evaluate academic achievement. The biggest threat to validity was the fact that credit hours attempted was not considered. The researcher decided in order to have a reasonable sample size, no minimum or maximum number of credit hours attempted would be established. Also, if the sample was large enough, this issue of credit hours

attempted would not severely effect the validity of the results.

Procedure

An enormous amount of time was spent creating the sample for this study. The researcher had chosen the Fall 1990 semester GPA to analyze college academic achievement; however, he did not wish to lump all ability levels together and possibly "muddy the waters". In other words, do not compare groups which contain both high-achievers and low-achievers; the two would cancel each other out thus the researcher would be unable to draw reliable conclusions. With this in mind a decision was made to use plus or minus two from the MSU mean ACT composite score as a guideline to create a reasonably homogeneous sample. The size of the sample depended on the size of the two sub-samples. First the Greek sub-sample had to be determined and then a comparable Independent sub-sample would follow.

To find the Greek sub-sample, the total population (1069) of Greeks on campus during the Fall 1990 semester were considered. Of those 1069 Greeks, 220 did not have an ACT score and were immediately eliminated from consideration.

Possible reasons for a student not to have an ACT on his/her permanent MSU record include: students who transfer in with at least 15 credit hours, part-time students, irregular students, or graduate students. The remaining 849 Greek ACTs had to be enhanced. Of those 849 Greeks, only 415 had an ACT which fell into the desired "plus or minus 2 from the MSU mean" range. Of those 415 Greeks remaining, 317 were Actives and 98 were Pledges. These Greek totals were also broken down by sex and also by College of Study. [See Table 3] The bottom line was the fact that a population of 1069 Greeks produced a sample of 415 Greeks. From this conclusion the researcher then proceeded with the task of finding a comparable Independent sub-sample.

A list of the first 1100 Independent students was taken from an alphabetical listing of the total population (approx. 7100) of Independent students on MSU campus in the Fall 1990 semester. From this list of 1100 Independents, 672 did not have an ACT score on their permanent record. After further examination, this did not seem too surprising. Compared to the Greek list, this Independent list had more part-time, transfer, irregular, and graduate students. As previously mentioned, these types of students do not have an ACT on their records. One must realize not many part-time, transfer, irregular, and graduate students will be members of Greek organizations. Next, the remaining 428 Independent ACTs had to be enhanced. Of those 428 Independents, only 178

had an ACT in the desired "plus or minus 2 from the MSU mean" range. The 178 Independents were also broken down by sex and by College of Study. This total of 178 Independents from an original 1100 seemed low but compared to the two Greek sub-samples, 317 Actives and 98 Pledges, this figure was not too alarming. [See Table 3]

Once both sub-samples were established, the researcher recorded each sample members' College, Sex, Status (Independent, Active, or Pledge), ACT, and finally GPA from Fall 1990. All of this information came off the University Main Frame, was recorded on a Macintosh, and finally transferred to an IBM compatible PC in order to perform the statistical analysis.

Results

The "Statistical Analysis System (SAS) Stat Guide for Personal Computers Version 6 Edition" was the package of software which analyzed this data. Several tests were run. An analysis of variance was performed on the GPAs each time by use of an F-test. Two different combinations of prerequisite information were tested.

First College versus Status was analyzed. [See Table 4] The SAS package checked to see if there was any two-way significance between the three Statuses and the seven Colleges. A p-value of .9194 was given thus informing the researcher there was not two-way significance. A p-value of less than .05 means the data is significant. A p-value of .05 to .10 is in the "gray area". In other words, do not bet the bank on these results. Next, each College was broken down by status showing that the hypothesis held true for the Colleges of Business and Public Affairs, Arts and Communications, Education, and Industry and Technology but not the remainders. [See Table 5] In these first four Colleges, notice the Independents did have a higher GPA than the Actives who had a higher GPA than the Pledges. However, the SAS program determined overall this was not a significant difference.

Next the program grouped all the members of both sub-samples together and checked for significant differences among the Colleges. After this F-test a p-value of .0006 was given thus emphasizing very significant results. [See Table 4] These results showed the College of Education and the College of Science had the highest mean GPAs but both were too close to say one was better than the other; however, they were considerably higher than the remaining Colleges. SAS also noted that of those remaining, only the Undecideds could be determined to be significantly lower than the rest. [See Table 6]

The second comparison was Sex versus Status. At this point SAS again checked for any two-way significance between Males/Females and Independents/Actives/Pledges. This time the F-test had a p-value of .0623 which was still not low enough to draw realistic conclusions. [See Table 7] A closer examination showed the hypothesis held true for Males. [See Table 8] Again the Male Independents had higher mean GPAs than the Male Actives who had higher GPAs than the Male Pledges. Unfortunately, the females did not follow this pattern again causing the overall variance to be insignificant.

Again the computer grouped both sub-samples together to compare Males versus Females. [See Table 9] This time, because of the large sample sizes, a significant difference

was found. The Females had a much higher GPA than did the Males.

Lastly, the Colleges were grouped together and only the three Statuses were compared. [See Table 10] It was determined that there was not a significant difference between Independent and Active, nor was there a significant difference between Actives and Pledges. However, there was a significant difference between Independent and Pledge mean GPAs.

Discussion

Summarizing the results, one can only conclude that students Independent of Greek organizations achieve higher academically than do Pledges of Greek organizations. The statistical data did not support the hypothesis that Independents achieved higher academically than Greeks. Moreover, the hypothesis that Active members of Greek organizations perform higher academically than Pledges of Greek organizations was also rejected.

This study unsuccessfully applied the transitive property to the two facts: Greeks scored lower on ACT (Wilder, 1972) and ACT is an excellent predictor of college achievement (Dohner, 1967; Beasley, Jr. and Sease, 1974; Halpin, Halpin, and Hauf, 1976; Malloch and Michael, 1981; Dreher and Singer, 1985). The conclusion could not be drawn that Independents achieved higher academically than Greeks.

This study did however raise a few questions. Is there a significant difference in mean College GPAs? Do Females perform higher academically than Males? Analysis of the data from this study concluded "yes" to both of the questions above. Has a can of worms been opened?

Table 1
Subjects

	F	I	A	P	M	I	A	P	Totals
Bus	79	28	28	23	87	16	66	5	166
Art	34	12	13	9	41	13	23	5	75
Edu	74	25	33	16	13	6	4	3	87
Hum	24	5	16	3	9	2	6	1	33
I&T	44	16	24	4	94	25	61	8	138
Sci	43	13	21	9	18	5	13	0	61
Und	24	8	5	11	9	4	4	1	33
Totals	322	107	140	75	271	71	177	23	

N=593

Table 2
Enhancement of ACT Composite Scores

Composite Score Pre- October 1989	Enhanced Score Post-October 1989	Estimated Score Interval
35	36	35-36
34	35	34-36
33	34	33-36
32	33	32-35
31	32	31-34
30	31	30-33
29	30	29-32
28	29	28-31
27	28	27-30
26	27	26-28
25	26	25-28
24	25	24-27
23	24	23-26
22	23	22-25
21	22	21-24
20	21	20-23
19	21	19-22
18	20	18-21
17	19	18-21
16	19	17-20
15	18	16-19
14	17	16-19
13	17	15-18
12	16	14-17
11	15	14-16
10	14	13-16
9	14	12-15
8	13	12-14
7	12	11-14
6	11	10-13
5	11	9-12
4	9	7-10
3	7	5-8
2	5	3-6
1	3	1-4

SOURCE: Office of Admissions & Records
Murray State University

Table 3
Mean ACT Composite Scores
Fall Semester 1985-1990

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990*
National	18.6	18.8	18.7	19.0	19.3	-
Kentucky	18.1	18.1	18.3	18.2	17.8	-
Murray State University	18.7	19.0	19.1	19.0	19.4	21.0

*Note: Scores reported after October of 1989 have been enhanced. See Table 2.

SOURCE: Office of Admissions & Records & CHE Reports
Murray State University

Table 4

Significance Test: College vs Status

Source	DF	Type 3 SS	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Col*Status	2	3.60721843	0.30060154	0.49	.9194
College	6	14.62787907	2.43797985	4.00	.0006
Status	2	1.08899628	0.54449814	0.89	.4102

Table 5
Grade Point Averages

College	Status	Size	Mean
Business and Public Affairs	Independent	44	2.64113636
	Active	94	2.54340426
	Pledge	28	2.45321429
Fine Arts and Communication	Independent	25	2.63920000
	Active	36	2.57805556
	Pledge	14	2.31642857
Education	Independent	31	3.07645161
	Active	37	2.88972973
	Pledge	19	2.78578947
Industry and Technology	Independent	41	2.57804878
	Active	85	2.55635294
	Pledge	12	2.06583333
Undecided	Independent	12	2.40833333
	Pledge	12	2.38333333
	Active	9	2.14444444
Science	Active	34	2.71882353
	Independent	18	2.64500000
	Pledge	9	2.59666667
Humanistic Studies	Pledge	4	2.71500000
	Active	22	2.67909091
	Independent	7	2.40428571

Table 6
College Mean Grade Point Averages

College	Size	Mean
Education	87	2.934
Science	61	2.679
Humanistic Studies	33	2.625
Business & Public Affairs	166	2.554
Fine Arts & Communication	75	2.550
Industry & Technology	138	2.520
Undecided	33	2.327

N=593

Table 7
Significance Test: Sex vs Status

Source	DF	Type 3 SS	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Sex*Status	2	3.38835353	1.69417677	2.79	.0623
Sex	1	5.42711006	5.42711006	8.93	.0029
Status	2	5.54255529	2.77127765	4.56	.0108

Table 8

GPA Differences Based on Sex and Status

Sex	Status	Size	Mean
Male	Independent	71	2.68281690
Male	Active	177	2.47983051
Male	Pledge	23	2.13782609
		N=271	
Female	Active	140	2.77035714
Female	Independent	107	2.67401869
Female	Pledge	75	2.56666667
		N=322	

Table 9
GPA Differences Based on Sex

Sex	Size	Mean
Female	322	2.6909
Male	271	2.5040

N=593

Table 10
GPA Differences Based on Status

Status	Size	Mean
Independent	178	2.6775
Active	317	2.6081
Pledge	98	2.4660

N=593

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